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OUTCAST PLATOON

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Chapter 1. Condemned Men

THEIR O.C. OUTLINED THE PLAN . . .
. . . SO ELEVEN PLATOON WILL BE THROUGH THAT GAP AND ENGAGING THE JAPS IN PRECISELY TEN MINUTES. RIGHT, TRENT?
UNDERSTOOD, SIR!

THE O.C. WENT OFF TO DEPLOY THE SUPPORT PLATOONS WHILE TRENT WAVED HIS MEN FORWARD . . .
FOLLOW ME, ELEVEN!
TRENT'S A FIRST-CLASS MAN—AND THESE LADS OF HIS WOULD FOLLOW HIM TO HELL AND BEYOND!

BUT TRENT KNEW WITH GRIM CERTAINTY WHAT THE OUTCOME OF THIS ATTACK WOULD BE FOR HIS SPENT AND EXHAUSTED MEN.
A FRONTAL ATTACK LIKE THIS, SERGEANT BARKER, MEANS NINETY PER CENT CASUALTIES BEFORE THE COMPANY CAN SUPPORT US...
YOU'RE NOT FAR WRONG THERE, SKIPPER.

TRENT HAD BEEN STUDYING THE DEATH-TRAP PASS BEFORE THEM.
LISTEN, SERGEANT— I'LL TAKE FIVE MEN THROUGH THE GAP— YOU TAKE THE REST OF THE PLATOON ROUND THAT BLUFF AND COME IN ON THE FLANK.
IT COULD WORK, SIR!

FRESH ORDERS WERE GIVEN, AND SERGEANT BARKER LED THE MAIN PARTY ROUND THE ROCKY OUTCROP AT THE DOUBLE.
DON'T HANG ABOUT, SAM— THE SKIPPER WON'T DELAY HIS ATTACK IF WE'RE LATE GETTING INTO POSITION.
DON'T WORRY, SARGE—WE WON'T LET TRENT DOWN!

BUT THEIR ROCKY FLANK-ROUTE TO THE PASS ENDED ABRUPTLY IN AN IMPASSABLE CHASM.
GOOD GRIEF! WE'RE CUT OFF. WE *CAN'T* ATTACK FROM THIS FLANK!
I CAN HEAR OUR SMALL-ARMS FIRE— *TRENT'S STARTED IN AGAINST THE JAPS!*

HIS FACE GREY WITH TIREDNESS AND ANXIETY, BARKER DROVE HIS MEN AT A PANTING RUN BACK TO THE POINT WHERE THEY COULD REJOIN THEIR PLATOON COMMANDER.
HE'S GONE IN WITHOUT US, ALL RIGHT!
HE'LL BE EXPECTING OUR HELP FROM THE FLANK— AND WE'RE STILL AT THE START-LINE!

AT THAT MOMENT, THE LEADING SUPPORT PLATOONS ARRIVED ON THE SCENE...
SERGEANT BARKER, WHY THE DEVIL ARE YOU AND YOUR MEN STILL HERE? WHERE'S YOUR PLATOON OFFICER?
MISTER TRENT IS FIGHTING THE WHOLE JAP ARMY, SIR — WE COULDN'T GET THROUGH THE WAY HE WANTED...

TRENT AND HIS PITIFUL FORCE WERE ALREADY CHALLENGING THE MASSIVE JAPANESE ADVANCE.
THEY'LL BE IN SERGEANT BARKER'S CROSSFIRE ANY MOMENT NOW.
BY GOLLY! I WISH THE SARGE WOULD GET A MOVE ON!

THE MOMENTARY HESITATION OF THE ENEMY SUDDENLY ENDED . . .
BY SHINTO! THERE ARE BUT FIVE OF THE WHITE DEVILS! FINISH THEM!

AS TRENT DEPLOYED HIS FEW MEN WITH VETERAN SKILL, HE, TOO, REALISED THAT THEY HAD NO CHANCE NOW.
IT'S ALL MY FAULT — MY PLAN MUST HAVE BEEN UNWORKABLE OR BARKER AND THE REST OF THE PLATOON WOULD BE FIRING FROM OUR RIGHT BY NOW.
AT LEAST THE REGIMENT'S BACKING US UP, SKIPPER — THEY'RE MORTARING THE JAPS!

DESPITE THEIR LOSSES, THE JAPANESE WERE CLOSING IN ON TRENT AND HIS MEN AND THE MAIN PART OF THE NORTHSHIRE BATTALION WOULD BE UNABLE TO SAVE THEM.
TRENT AND HIS HANDFUL ARE STILL FIGHTING, COLONEL!
BY HEAVENS! IF THEY'RE KILLED, I'LL MAKE THE REST OF HIS COWARDLY PLATOON WISH THEY'D NEVER BEEN BORN! PUT THEM UNDER ARREST—RIGHT NOW!
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SO, WHILE THE BATTALION MOVED IN, A VIOLENTLY PROTESTING SERGEANT BARKER AND HIS MEN WERE DISARMED AND PUT UNDER GUARD.
I TELL YOU WE'VE GOT TO GET TO OUR PLATOON COMMANDER!
IT'S TOO LATE TO PLAY HEROES NOW, BARKER...

ANGRY AND BITTER, THE BULK OF No.11 PLATOON WERE CONDUCTED BACK TO REAR ECHELON.
THAT'S DRUMMOND ON THE STRETCHER— HE WAS WITH MISTER TRENT! I'VE GOT TO TALK TO HIM!
SORRY, HE'S UNCONSCIOUS. ANYWAY, HE'S BOOKED FOR THE HOSPITAL PLANE TO CALCUTTA...

THE BATTALION, HAVING ACHIEVED ITS OBJECTIVES, WAS RELIEVED BY FRESH TROOPS AND MOVED BACK FROM THE BATTLE AREA.
HAS MISTER TRENT COME BACK? HE CAN PROVE WE DIDN'T RUN OUT ON HIM!
NO, HE DIDN'T COME BACK—YOU ROTTEN QUITTERS!

THE BATTALION MOVED NORTHWARD, TAKING THE "SHAME" OF No.11 WITH THEM.
ALL GONE EXCEPT DRUMMOND. IF HE DIES IN THAT CALCUTTA HOSPITAL, NO-ONE WILL BELIEVE WE CARRIED OUT ORDERS...
THEY'RE TAKING US TO FORT SAINT DAVID, SARGE!

FORT St. DAVID, IN THE FOOTHILLS, WAS A CENTURY-OLD BASTION OF BRITISH VICTORIAN RULE IN BURMA.
WHAT ARE THEY CHARGING US WITH, SIR?
COWARDICE IN THE FACE OF THE ENEMY, SERGEANT— WHAT ELSE?

PRELIMINARY STATEMENTS LEADING UP TO A COURT MARTIAL WERE MADE AND SIGNED BY THE ACCUSED MEN.
ONE MAN COULD CLEAR US, SIR—AND THAT'S CORPORAL DRUMMOND WHO WAS TAKEN TO HOSPITAL.
A STATEMENT WILL BE TAKEN FROM DRUMMOND WHEN A DATE FOR YOUR COURT-MARTIAL IS FIXED, SERGEANT.

BUT NEXT DAY, THE REGIMENT WAS ORDERED TO MOVE OUT TO ANOTHER SECTOR OF THE FRONT.
ELEVEN PLATOON WILL PARADE WITH THE NORTHSHIRES FOR THE LAST TIME.
THE REGIMENT'S DRAWN UP IN HOLLOW SQUARE!

BARKER KNEW WHAT THAT MEANT—THE CEREMONIAL DEGRADING, THE DRUMMING-OUT OF MEN DESPISED BY THEIR FORMER COMRADES.
SO WE'RE CONDEMNED WITHOUT A HEARING!
IN THE EYES OF THE REGIMENT YOU'VE CONDEMNED YOURSELVES. YOU'LL BE LEFT HERE FOR YOUR COURT-MARTIAL...

ON THE PARADE-GROUND, THE SILENT LINES OF THE COMPANIES WITNESSED THE HUMILIATION OF THE OUTCAST PLATOON.
TEAR OFF THEIR SHOULDER FLASHES AND THE CHEVRONS OF THEIR N.C.O.S.
MARCH THEM AWAY. THEY NO LONGER BELONG TO THIS REGIMENT...

Chapter 2. The Fort

THE NORTHSHIRES PULLED OUT AND THE UNWANTED PLATOON WERE HANDED OVER TO THE CAMP COMMANDANT OF THE FORT.

THIS FORT IS ONLY A BACK AREA LABOUR CAMP NOWADAYS. WHY TRANSFER THESE SOLDIERS TO ME?

THEY'RE NOT SOLDIERS, CAPTAIN MOGSON — THEY'RE A MOB OF BATTLE DODGERS. THEY'RE ALL YOURS...

CAPTAIN MOGSON, TOO OLD HIMSELF FOR FRONT LINE DUTY, ASSIGNED THE NEWCOMERS TO A BARRACK-BLOCK AND READ THEIR DOCUMENTS.

MEN, SERGEANT WILKIE. THEY'RE PROBABLY BATTLE-SHOCK CASES. THEY CAN HELP BUILD THE NEW AIRSTRIP...

THEY RECKON SOME WOUNDED CORPORAL NAMED DRUMMOND COULD CLEAR THEM.

IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS, BARKER AND HIS OUTCASTS LABOURED ON THE AIRSTRIP, LEVELLING THE GROUND AND FELLING TREES WITH THE NATIVE WORKERS.
CAPTAIN MOGSON, THE PLATOON WANTS TO KNOW WHAT'S BEING DONE TO TRACE DRUMMOND SO AS TO GET US A FAIR HEARING.
I'M SURE THAT WILL BE DONE, BARKER – BUT YOUR COURT-MARTIAL HAS BEEN DELAYED, ANYWAY.
DANGEROUS

NEXT DAY, GUNFIRE ECHOED DISTANTLY IN THE HILLS . . .
EXPLOSIONS, SIR! IS THE WAR COMING THIS WAY?
OF COURSE NOT, WILKIE – IT MUST BE OUR ARTILLERY HAVING A PRACTICE SHOOT!

BUT, THAT AFTERNOON, IN THE FOREST ACROSS THE VALLEY, THERE WERE SINISTER STIRRINGS.
SEE WHAT I SEE, SARGE?
THAT FLIGHT OF BIRDS? YOU'RE RIGHT, SAM. SOMEONE'S UP IN THE WOODS. NO BRITISH UNIT THERE, THAT I KNOW OF...

WHEN MOVING REFLECTIONS OF SUN ON DISTANT METAL CONFIRMED THEIR SUSPICIONS, BARKER REPORTED AT COMPANY OFFICE...
LISTEN, THERE'S A PARTY OF JAPS SNOOPING AROUND ACROSS THE VALLEY.
YOU'RE CRAZY!

WILKIE TRIED TO STIFLE HIS ALARM, AND BARKER GRINNED AT HIS DISCOMFORT.
SUIT YOURSELF! LET THE NIPS WALK IN — THIS STATELY HOME IS OPEN TO THE PUBLIC!
CAPTAIN MOGSON'S NOT HERE — HE'S OUT IN HIS TRUCK.

FOR THE SECOND TIME THAT DAY, THE DISTANT HILLSIDE ECHOED TO AN EXPLOSION.
IT'S LIKE THE CAPTAIN SAID— IT'S A PRACTICE SHOOT!
PRACTICE SHOOT, MY EYE! THAT'S A TRUCK BURNING! MAYBE YOUR CAPTAIN MOGSON'S IN IT . . .

WILKIE TURNED BACK NERVOUSLY INTO THE FORT.
YOU'D BETTER CALL CORPS H.Q. AND REPORT THE INCIDENTS — THEY'D WANT TO KNOW.
IF THE FORT'S IN DANGER, THEY'LL HAVE TO SEND TROOPS — WE'RE NOT A FIGHTING UNIT.

WHILE THE SERGEANT HURRIED TO THE SIGNALS OFFICE, BARKER ROUNDED UP THE MEN ON THE AIRSTRIP AND POSTED SENTRIES.
I CAN'T GET THROUGH TO H.Q. MAYBE WE SHOULD EVACUATE . . .
EVACUATE — NOTHING! OPEN UP THE ARMOURY AND LET'S HAVE SOME GUNS.

WILKIE FLINCHED AT THE CONTEMPT IN BARKER'S VOICE, AND POINTED UNCERTAINLY INSIDE THE COMPANY OFFICE.
THERE'S THE ARMOURY KEY. BUT YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO HAVE GUNS — YOU'RE AWAITING COURT-MARTIAL.
COMF
THERE'LL BE NO-ONE TO COURT-MARTIAL — UNLESS ME AND MY LAOS LOOK AFTER OURSELVES.

THE SHAN WORKERS READILY ACCEPTED BARKER'S ASSURED LEADERSHIP AND AGREED TO FIGHT IF NECESSARY.
WE'VE GOT TO FIND OUT WHAT'S HAPPEN NG ACROSS THE VALLEY. KEEP THE FORT GUARDS ON THEIR TOES, SAM, WHILE I TAKE A RECCE PARTY OUT.
OKAY, SARGE!

THE DOOR OF THE FORT CREAKED SHUT — AND BARKER'S RECCE PARTY WAS ON ITS OWN.
KEEP UNDER COVER AND REPORT ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS.
MOVEMENT TO OUR LEFT, SARGE — DOWN IN THE VALLEY.

THE RECCE PARTY, SKILLED IN JUNGLE TACTICS, WORKED SILENTLY NEARER THE INTRUDERS.
AT LEAST THIRTY OF THE PERISHERS!
MOVE ALONG THE RIDGE A BIT — THEN WE'LL JUMP THEM!

BUT AS BARKER'S MEN TOOK UP AN ATTACK POSITION, A BOULDER WAS DISLODGED . . .
BY SHINTO! THE WHITE DEVILS!

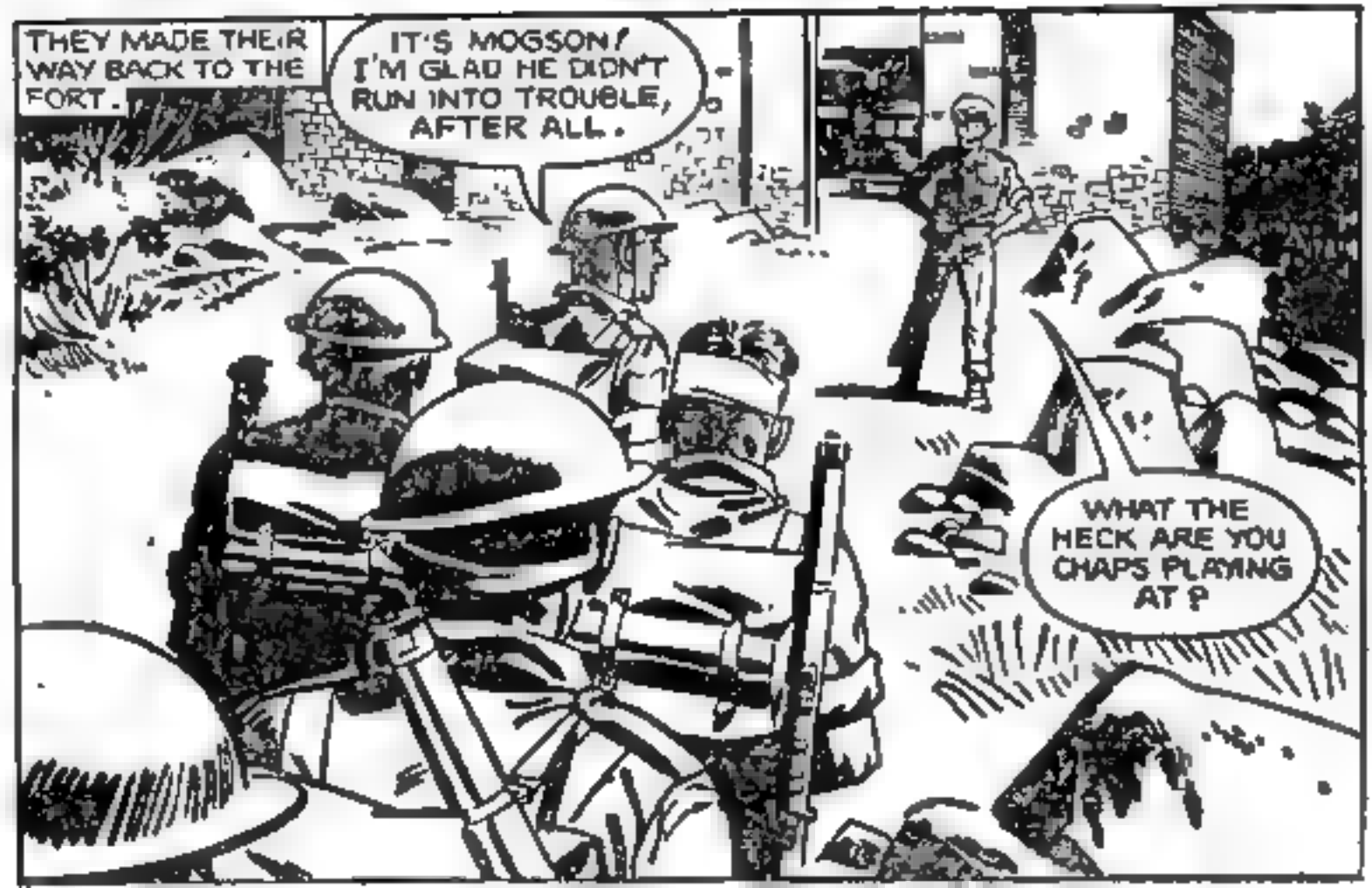
THE REACTION OF THE ENEMY WAS LIGHTNING-FAST. BUT THEIR FIRE WAS ONLY DIRECTED AT THE SPOT FROM WHICH THE BOULDER HAD FALLEN.
RIGHT, LADS! WE'VE GOT TO HIT 'EM HARD —NOW!

THE HILLS ECHOED TO THE CLATTER OF AUTOMATIC WEAPONS AND THE FLAT CRACK OF RIFLES.
THAT'S THE TRUCK WE SAW THEM FIRE THIS AFTERNOON... ANY SIGN OF MOGSON?
IT'S SOME OTHER UNIT'S TRUCK, I THINK.

THE JAPANESE OFFICER TRIED TO RALLY HIS MEN AFTER THAT FIRST SHOCK ONSLAUGHT BUT EX-SERGEANT BARKER GAVE THEM NO CHANCE.
WILL YOU LET SIX MEN DEFEAT YOU? FIGHT!
CHARGE 'EM BEFORE THEY REGROUP!

ALL THE PENT UP SAVAGERY OF BARKER'S BITTER FIGHTING-MEN WENT INTO THAT SKIRMISH — AND THE JAPS BROKE.
THE RIVER — IT IS OUR ONLY CHANCE!
CUT THEM OFF!

THE RACKET OF BATTLE ENDED AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD BEGUN.
WE'VE GOT THE LOT, SARGE — AND MILLER'S GASHED HEAD IS OUR ONLY CASUALTY!
A JAP PATROL AS STRONG AS THIS MEANS PLENTY MORE ARE SOMEWHERE ACROSS THE RIVER...


THEY MADE THEIR WAY BACK TO THE FORT.
IT'S MOGSON! I'M GLAD HE DIDN'T RUN INTO TROUBLE, AFTER ALL.
WHAT THE HECK ARE YOU CHAPS PLAYING AT?

THE INDIGNANT CAPTAIN ORDERED THEM INTO THE FORT.
I TURN MY BACK TO MAKE A SURVEY OF THE PERIMETER AND WHEN I RETURN, I FIND THE PLACE IN UPROAR!
THE WAR'S REACHING YOUR DOORSTEP, I'M AFRAID, SIR!

MOGSON STARED AT BARKER AS IF HE WERE CRAZY.
I HEARD YOU SHOOTING UP THERE IN THE HILLS — AT SHADOWS, I SUPPOSE!
WE'RE NOT USED TO MAKING THAT SORT OF MISTAKE, SIR.

ABRUPTLY, MOGSON ORDERED BARKER TO COMPANY OFFICE.
WILKIE, READ THE SIT. REP. WE'VE JUST HAD FROM CORPS H.Q.
IT SAYS: 'KINDLY CALM DOWN. NO JAPS ANYWHERE NEAR YOUR AREA...'

BARKER SHRUGGED HOPELESSLY. AND THOUGHT OF OTHER OCCASIONS WHEN REAR H.Q.S HAD BEEN WRONG.
YOU'LL FIND THIRTY DEAD JAPS DOWN BY THE RIVER.
THAT'S ENOUGH, BARKER. I'VE ALSO HAD A SIGNAL ABOUT YOU. YOUR PLATOON WILL LEAVE FOR CALCUTTA TONIGHT.

BARKER TOOK THE NEWS TO THE MEN OF THE PLATOON.
SO WE FACE THE CHARGES AGAINST US AT LAST! THAT SUITS US FINE!
ALL WE'VE GOT TO DO IS FIND DRUMMOND IN THE CALCUTTA HOSPITAL — AND WE'RE CLEARED!

IT WAS SERGEANT WILKIE WHO PARADED THEM FOR THEIR JOURNEY NORTH.
WHY IS MOGSON LETTING US GO ARMED, WITH ONLY YOU AS AN ESCORT? DOESN'T HE REALISE WE'RE UNDER ARREST?
IT'S MY IDEA, BARKER. DON'T MAKE A SHOUT ABOUT IT.

THE FOXY WILKIE WENT ON TO EXPLAIN AS THE TRUCK TOOK THEM ON THE FIRST LEG OF THEIR LONG JOURNEY.
I BELIEVE YOU, BARKER, WHEN YOU SAY THERE ARE JAPS IN THIS AREA. WITH YOU BLOKES ARMED, I FEEL SAFER...
BUT WE'RE DRIVING INTO SAFE TERRITORY—THESE GUNS ARE NEEDED BACK AT THE FORT.

WITHOUT WARNING STARSHELLS LIT THE SOUTHERN SKY, AND SMALL ARMS FIRE CRACKLED FAINTLY IN THE DISTANCE.
SOMETHING'S HAPPENING BACK AT THE FORT!
IT'S BEING ATTACKED, I RECKON!

BARKER SHOUTED TO THE SHAN DRIVER TO HALT.
WHO TOLD YOU TO STOP THIS TRUCK? YOU'RE UNDER MY ORDERS, BARKER!
YOU'VE LEFT MOGSON PRETTY NEAR DEFENCELESS, WILKIE...

WILKIE RAGED AT BARKER IN HIS PANIC...
YOU DON'T OWE ANYTHING TO MOGSON! HE WOULDN'T BELIEVE YOU WHEN YOU WARNED HIM! ARE YOU GOING TO BREAK ARREST FOR HIM?
YOU'RE A RAT, WILKIE! WE'RE GOING BACK!

Chapter 3. Last Hope

FROM THE FORT GATE, MOGSON COULD SEE THE GLOW FROM A BURNING VILLAGE DOWN BY THE RIVER. HE SQUARED HIS SHOULDERS RESOLUTELY.
WE'LL DEFEND THE FORT TO THE LAST MAN — GET OUR SHANS TOGETHER!
ALL BUT TEN OF THE SHANS HAVE DONE A BUNK, SIR — I RECKON WE SHOULD, TOO!
MAN THE WALLS — NO, FIRST OF ALL, GET OUR TRUCKS AND TRACTOR EQUIPMENT IN FROM THE AIRFIELD.
WHAT, GO OUT THERE NOW?

CAPTAIN MOGSON SNORTED DISGUSTEDLY . . .
ALL RIGHT, FOLLOW ME! THE JOB'S GOT TO BE DONE!
THE DARK SHAPES OF THE TRUCKS SOON BECAME VISIBLE IN THE LIGHT OF FLARES FIRED INTO THE SKY BY THE JEPS.
THERE ARE THE TRUCKS! GET TWO SHANS TO DRIVE THEM INTO THE FORT, CORPORAL.
ER—VERY GOOD, SIR! BUT THE JAPS . . .

THE TWO TRUCKS WERE DRIVEN TO SAFETY, BUT THE JAP MARAUDERS WERE ALREADY NEARING THE AIRFIELD.
THEY'RE MAKING FOR OUR TRACTOR SHEDS! WE'RE TOO LATE!
WE'VE GOT TO GET BACK TO THE FORT BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE!

WITHIN MINUTES, THE TRACTORS ON THE EDGE OF THE AIR-STRIP WERE BLOWN SKY-HIGH.
YOU'RE RIGHT, WILLIAMS —WE MUSTN'T BE CUT OFF FROM THE FORT.

AS THE SHORT-SIGHTED CAPTAIN BEGAN TO LEAD HIS MEN ALONG A GULLY, CORPORAL WILLIAMS STAYED HIM ANXIOUSLY.
FOR PETE'S SAKE, SIR — YOU'RE GOING THE WRONG WAY!
ARE YOU SURE, WILLIAMS? I'M NOT VERY GOOD IN THE DARK.

MOGSON STARED ABOUT HIM, PUZZLED — AND THEN SAW THE JAPANESE ONLY YARDS AWAY.
GREAT SCOTT! JAPANESE!
WHITE DEVILS!

CAPTAIN MOGSON, COMMISSIONED BECAUSE HE KNEW THE SHAN LANGUAGE AND COULD BUILD AIR-STRIPS, SHOT IN ANGER FOR THE FIRST TIME.
TAKE COVER, EVERYBODY!
THEY'RE EVERYWHERE! GET DOWN, SIR!

MOGSON WAS NO FIGHTING OFFICER — BUT HE DID NOT LACK COURAGE
HAVE A CARE, WILLIAMS, YOU'RE SPOILING MY AIM!
BANZAI! SLAY THE BRITISH DOGS!

WILLIAMS FOUGHT DOWN THE ICY PANIC THAT HAD GRIPPED HIM. FOR IT WAS NOW A CASE OF FIGHT — OR DIE!
ALL TOGETHER, FIRE!
BLOOD-CURDLING YELLS CUT THE NIGHT AND MOGSON GAVE A CRY OF TRIUMPH AS THE FIRST WAVE OF JAPS TOPPLED TO THE GROUND.
THEY'RE GOING DOWN LIKE NINEPINS!
THAT WASN'T OUR SHOOTING — HELP HAS ARRIVED FROM SOMEWHERE!

BARKER AND THE OUTCAST PLATOON HAD RETURNED IN THE NICK OF TIME.
IT'S THAT CROWD WE SENT OFF FOR COURT-MARTIAL, SIR!
BARKER? GOOD HEAVENS! WHAT'S HE DOING HERE?

BARKER AND HIS MEN CHARGED FORWARD - OVER THE HEADS OF MOGSON AND HIS MEN.
STRAIGHT AT 'EM, LADS!
DON'T JUST STAND THERE, WILLIAMS - JOIN THE COUNTER-ATTACK!

THE JAPS STRUGGLED TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE BUT IN VAIN.
KEEP HAMMERING AT 'EM!
THIS'LL TEACH THOSE VANDALS NOT TO GO BLOWING UP MY TRACTORS!

THOSE JAPANESE THAT SURVIVED THAT ASSAULT, BROKE AND FLED.
THAT RADIO'S BROKEN. NOW WE'D BETTER GET BACK TO THE FORT, SIR
YOU'RE RIGHT, BARKER! IT SEEMS TO ME MANY PEOPLE HAVE MADE A BIG MISTAKE ABOUT YOU AND YOUR MEN.

THERE'S STILL SHOOTING IN THE HILLS.
THE WHOLE FRONT MUST HAVE SHIFTED— AND THE FORT IS IN THE THICK OF IT.

SERGEANT WILKE MET THEM AS THEY NEARED THE FORT . . .
I DECIDED BARKER AND HIS MEN HAD BETTER RETURN WHEN I SAW WE MIGHT BE NEEDED, SIR.
THAT PERISHING LIAR, WILKIE, IS TRYING TO SAVE HIS FACE.

BUT MOGSON TOOK NO NOTICE OF WILKIE.
THE JAPS WILL CERTAINLY RENEW THEIR ATTACK, BARKER— I'M MAKING YOU TEMPORARY SERGEANT-MAJOR, AND THE ONE CALLED SAM, SERGEANT. MAN THE WALLS AND REPORT TO ME.
YES, SIR!

WHEN THE FORT WAS AT THE READY, BARKER WENT TO COMPANY OFFICE.
CORPS H.Q. SAY, 'HOLD THE FORT AT ANY COST', BARKER. IN RETURN, I'VE INSISTED THEY TRACE THAT WOUNDED MAN YOU WANT FOR YOUR COURT-MARTIAL DEFENCE!
DRUMMOND? HIS EVIDENCE WOULD CLEAR US! THANK YOU, SIR!

BARKER KNEW THEN THAT MOGSON WOULD SPARE NO EFFORT TO HELP THE PLATOON.
AFTER TONIGHT, I ENTIRELY BELIEVE YOU, BARKER — BUT H.Q. IS IN SUCH A FLAP THEY THINK I'M CRAZY.
THE LOOK-OUT SAYS BRITISH TROOPS ARE COMING THROUGH THE PASS!

THEY WENT UP TO THE BATTLEMENTS...
IT'S THE REMNANTS OF A BRITISH COMPANY AND THEY'RE HARD PRESSED.
STAND BY TO GIVE COVERING FIRE— AND GET THE DOORS OPEN.

THE RETREATING COMPANY STREAMED INTO THE FORT...
LET THE JAPS HAVE IT!
THEY'RE FALLING BACK!

A LIEUTENANT-COLONEL HEADED THE REFUGEES...
I'M COLONEL WELLS, SEAMOOR HIGHLANDERS. MUCH OBLIGED TO YOU, CAPTAIN MOGSON — BUT NOW I'D BETTER TAKE OVER...
THE FORT'S DEFENCES ARE IN GOOD HANDS, COLONEL.

BUT COLONEL WELLS CONSIDERED HE KNEW BETTER.
YOUR CAMP LABOUR CHAPS HAVE DONE ALL RIGHT, BUT MY FRONT LINE TROOPS WILL RELIEVE THEM ON THE WALLS. NOW I MUST SEND A REPORT TO CORPS H.Q....
IT'S MY FORT, DARN IT! HE'S PULLING RANK ON ME!

THE COLONEL CALLED IN HIS RADIO OPERATOR AND MADE HIMSELF AT HOME IN MOGSON'S COMPANY OFFICE.
WHAT'S GOING ON HERE, MOGSON? H.Q. SAYS YOU'VE TWENTY MEN DUE FOR COURT-MARTIAL RUNNING AROUND LOOSE.
THEY SAVED THE FORT TONIGHT...

CHAPS LIKE THAT ONLY FIGHT TO SAVE THEIR OWN SKINS. PUT 'EM UNDER OPEN ARREST, CAPTAIN MOGSON.
YOU'RE MAKING A BIG MISTAKE, COLONEL!

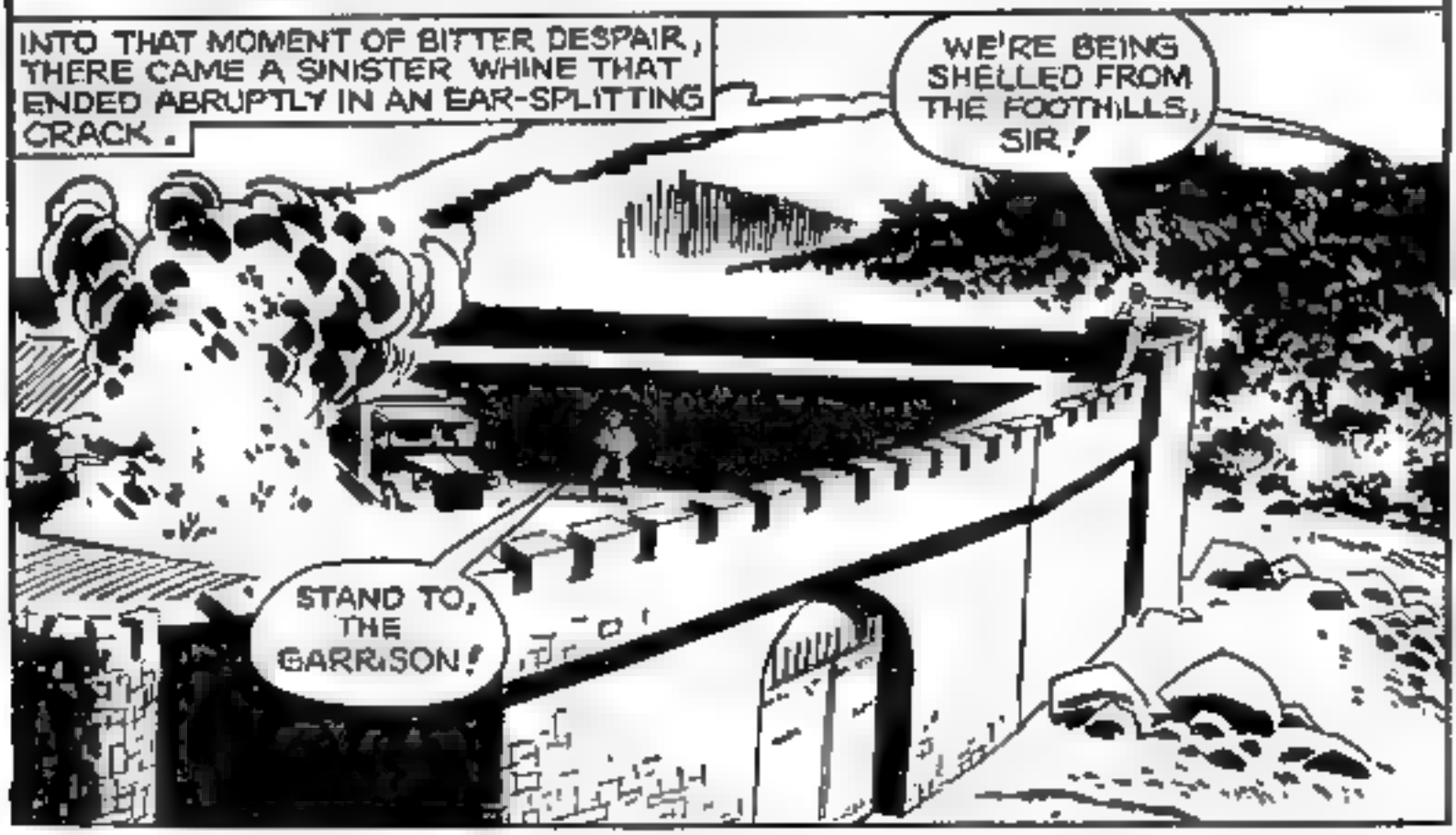
MOGSON'S INDIGNATION ONLY MADE THE COLONEL MORE DETERMINED.
YOU'RE EX-SERGEANT BARKER? YOUR PLATOON WILL TURN OVER ALL WEAPONS TO MY MEN AND THE REMAINING SHANS. YOU WILL STAY IN YOUR BARRACK-ROOM...
I'M SORRY, BARKER— THEY'RE THE COLONEL'S ORDERS.

ALL THAT DAY BARKER AND HIS MEN WERE CONFINED TO BARRACKS, WHILE THE SEAMOORS REPULSED REPEATED JAP ATTACKS.
ONE OF THE SHANS SAYS THIS FORT IS THE ONLY STRONGPOINT HOLDING UP THE JAP ADVANCE.
WHO CARES? WE GET IT IN THE NECK WHICHEVER SIDE WINS.

BARKER SAW SULLEN BITTER REBELLION BREWING AMONG HIS PLATOON
WHY DON'T WE BREAK OPEN THE ARMOURY, GET THE WEAPONS WE NEED AND TAKE TO THE HILLS.
THAT WOULD RUIN MOGSON'S EFFORTS TO HELP US. HE'S PRESSURING THE AUTHORITIES TO GET DRUMMOND'S EVIDENCE —AND THAT WOULD FREE US IMMEDIATELY.

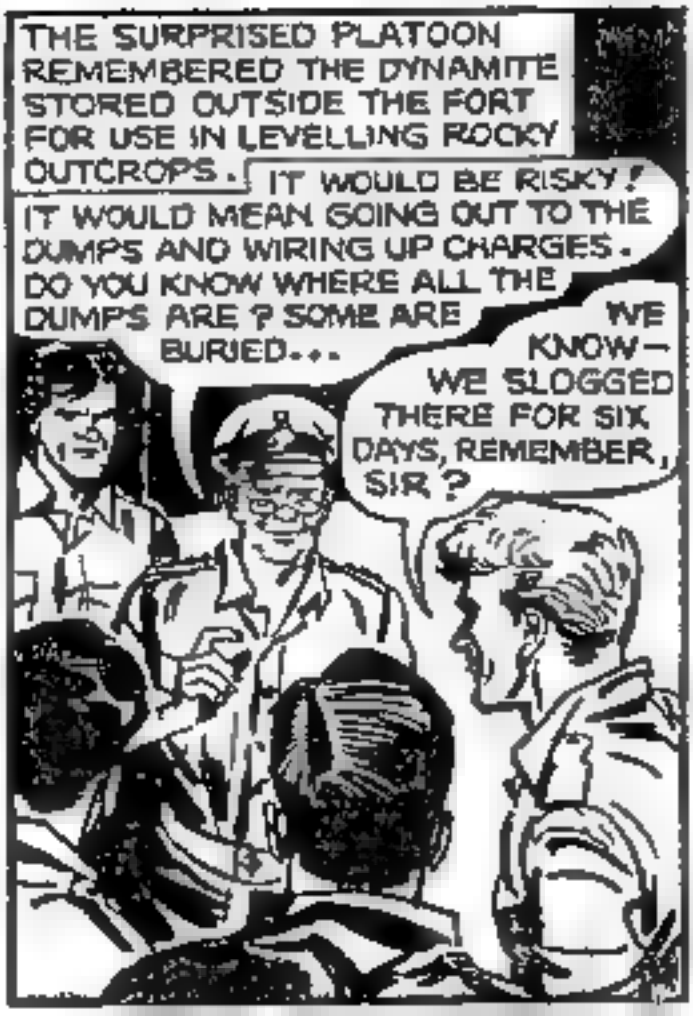
THAT AFTERNOON, MOGSON CAME TO THEM WITH A RADIO MESSAGE HE HAD RECEIVED FROM CORPS H.Q.
BARKER, I'VE HAD THE WORST POSSIBLE NEWS! DRUMMOND DIED THREE DAYS AGO WITHOUT RECOVERING CONSCIOUSNESS.
OUR LAST HOPE DEAD! WE'RE AS GOOD AS CONDEMNED FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES.

Chapter 4. Gamble with Death



THE MEN WHO HAD BEEN BRANDED YELLOW WERE SEETHING WITH REVOLT.
LET'S BREAK THE ARMOURY DOOR! FROM NOW ON, WE'LL FIGHT FOR OURSELVES...
BARKER, HOLD YOUR MEN—THE ARMOURY'S EMPTY! BUT THERE'S A WAY WE MIGHT SMASH THE JAP ATTACK!
ARMOURY

IN MOGSON'S EYES, THERE WAS THE BRIGHT LIGHT OF INSPIRATION.
COOL OFF AND LISTEN TO THE CAPTAIN!
SUPPOSING WE DYNAMITED THE AIRFIELD JUST AS THE JAPS CHARGE OVER IT?
ARMOURY


THE SURPRISED PLATOON REMEMBERED THE DYNAMITE STORED OUTSIDE THE FORT FOR USE IN LEVELLING ROCKY OUTCROPS.
IT WOULD BE RISKY! IT WOULD MEAN GOING OUT TO THE DUMPS AND WIRING UP CHARGES. DO YOU KNOW WHERE ALL THE DUMPS ARE? SOME ARE BURIED...
WE KNOW— WE SLOGGED THERE FOR SIX DAYS, REMEMBER, SIR?

MOGSON SKETCHED HIS PLAN IN THE DUST . . .
WE'D NEED DETONATORS, INSULATED LEADS AND THE CONTROL BOX HERE. I THINK IT WOULD WORK . . .
IF WE CAN'T MAKE IT WORK, NOBODY CAN . . .

BUT MOGSON FIRST HAD TO GET THE AGREEMENT OF COLONEL WELLS.
SPREAD PARCELS OF DYNAMITE OVER THE AIRFIELD, EH? LINKED FOR SIMULTANEOUS DISCHARGE. NOT A BAD SCHEME, MOGSON —I'LL GET A PARTY OF MY CHAPS ON TO IT.
NOT YOUR CHAPS, COLONEL—MY CHAPS!

THE COLONEL STARED AT MOGSON AS IF HE HAD GONE MAD ...
THOSE ROUGHNECKS AWAITING COURT-MARTIAL! SEND THEM ON THIS OPERATION — NOT LIKELY, MOGSON.
I'M SORRY, SIR. YOUR PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHERE THE DUMPS ARE — MINE DO!
YOU EXPECT ME TO TRUST THAT COWARDLY MOB TO DO A JOB UNDER FIRE?
I WOULD TRUST THEM WITH MY LIFE, COLONEL.
IT WAS GALL AND WORMWOOD TO THE SEAMOORS' COLONEL THAT HIS OWN MEN SHOULD HAVE TO TAKE SECOND PLACE TO BARKER AND HIS OUTCASTS.
THE SOUTH WALL'S NEARLY HAD IT, SIR.
YOU WIN MOGSON — GET YOUR MEN TOGETHER.

THE COLONEL HAD THE MORTIFICATION OF DEPRIVING HIS OWN MEN OF WEAPONS TO ARM BARKER'S PLATOON.
YOU DON'T NEED TO COME WITH US, CAPTAIN MOGSON.
NONSENSE, BARKER — I'M RUNNING THIS SHOW!

DESPITE THE COLONEL'S ANGER, HE GAVE EVERY SUPPORT HE COULD TO THE PLATOON AS THEY LEFT THE FORT...
GOOD! THE SEAMOORS ARE COVERING US WITH SMOKE. YOU ALL KNOW YOUR JOBS?
YOU BET, SARGE!

IN PARTIES OF THREE THEY CRAWLED OVER THE SMOKE-WREATHED GROUND TO THE DUMPS ASSIGNED TO THEM.
GET YOUR DETONATORS READY...
I'LL MAKE A TEMPORARY H.Q. HERE, BARKER. ALL THE WIRED CHARGES SHOULD LEAD BACK TO ME.
DYNAMITE

SWIFTLY, BARKER'S PARTY DISPERSED BOXES OF DYNAMITE IN THE PATH THE JAPS WOULD TAKE IF THEY CHARGED THE BREACH IN THE FORT WALL.
NOW TO BURY THIS WELCOME PACKET. START REELING THE CONNECTION BACK TO THE CAPTAIN.
DYNAMITE

ELSEWHERE ON THE AIRFIELD . . .
GOOD, THAT'S ANOTHER BLOCK-BUSTER BURIED. SOMEWHERE, THERE'S A FUEL TANK WITH HIGH OCTANE FUEL IN IT . . .
IT'S UNDER THAT CONCRETE SLAB, SAM.

SAM MINED THE FUEL TANK FOR LUCK, AND THEY PAID OUT THE INSULATED LEADS TO MOGSON'S IMPROVISED H.Q.
WE'VE GOT TWENTY EXPLOSIVE CHARGES ON ALL PARTS OF THE AIRFIELD. THAT LEAVES SIX MORE TO BE LINKED ON TO THE CONTROL BOX.
HERE'S ONE OF THEM!

THE LAST OF THE PLATOON REPORTED BACK.
WE'VE RUN OUT OF CABLE. WE CAN'T TAKE THE BOX INTO THE FORT— WE'LL HAVE TO DETONATE THE CHARGES FROM HERE!
THE BARRAGE HAS STOPPED—THE JAPS ARE COMING!
FROM THE BATTERED FORT, COLONEL WELLS TRIED TO MAKE OUT WHAT WAS GOING ON.
SOMETHING'S GOING WRONG, SIR!
I KNEW IT! THE JAPS ARE COMING AND THAT MOGSON'S GOT HALF OUR SMALL ARMS!

FOR THE OUTCAST PLATOON THERE WAS NO GOING BACK NOW . . .
IF THE BOX SETS OFF A FEW OF THE CHARGES, THE REST SHOULD DETONATE, TOO.
WE MAY HAVE BITTEN OFF MORE THAN WE CAN CHEW, BARKER. WILL SOMEBODY KINDLY LEND ME A RIFLE?

SUDDENLY, MOGSON GAVE A CRY OF DISMAY.
WE CAN'T DO IT—WE CAN'T BLOW UP THE AIRFIELD!
BUT THE PLUNGER'S CONNECTED—WE ONLY HAVE TO WAIT TILL THEY'RE ON THE AIRFIELD.

THEN THE SERGEANT UNDERSTOOD . . .
THE YELLOW BARBARIANS! THEY'RE DRIVING BRITISH PRISONERS IN FRONT OF THEM AS A SCREEN!
IF WE BLOW UP THE AIRFIELD, WE BLOW UP OUR OWN LADS WITH THEM!

THE BRITISH PRISONERS STUMBLED TOWARDS THEM, GOADED ON BY THE BAYONETS OF THE YELLING JAPS.
THEY'RE CROSSING THE MINEFIELD NOW— WE'LL HAVE TO GAUGE WHEN OUR CHAPS ARE SAFELY OVER IT!
GOOD GRIEF, SARGE— THAT'S MISTER TRENT IN FRONT!

LIEUTENANT TRENT, THEIR OFFICER THEY BELIEVED DEAD— THE ONLY MAN WHO COULD FREE THEM FROM THE CHARGE OF COWARDICE. YET THEY MUST RISK KILLING HIM IF THEY WERE TO SAVE THE FORT.
SAM, SHOUT TO THE LIEUTENANT AND THE PRISONERS TO FLING THEMSELVES FLAT!
OKAY, SARGE!

SUDDENLY, ONE OF THE PRISONERS POINTED EXCITEDLY AHEAD.
A BRITISH PATROL! WHAT ARE THEY SHOUTING?
MISTER TRENT, GO TO EARTH, NOW!

THE PRISONERS REACTED INSTANTLY...
ON YOUR FACES, EVERYBODY!
GET THE WHITE DEVILS ON THEIR FEET, QUICKLY!

SAVAGELY, BARKER THRUST THE PLUNGER DOWN. THERE WAS AN EAR-SPLITTING ROAR AND THE GROUND QUAKED BENEATH THEIR FEET . . .
CRIKEY, THE WHOLE ARFIELD'S GONE UP!

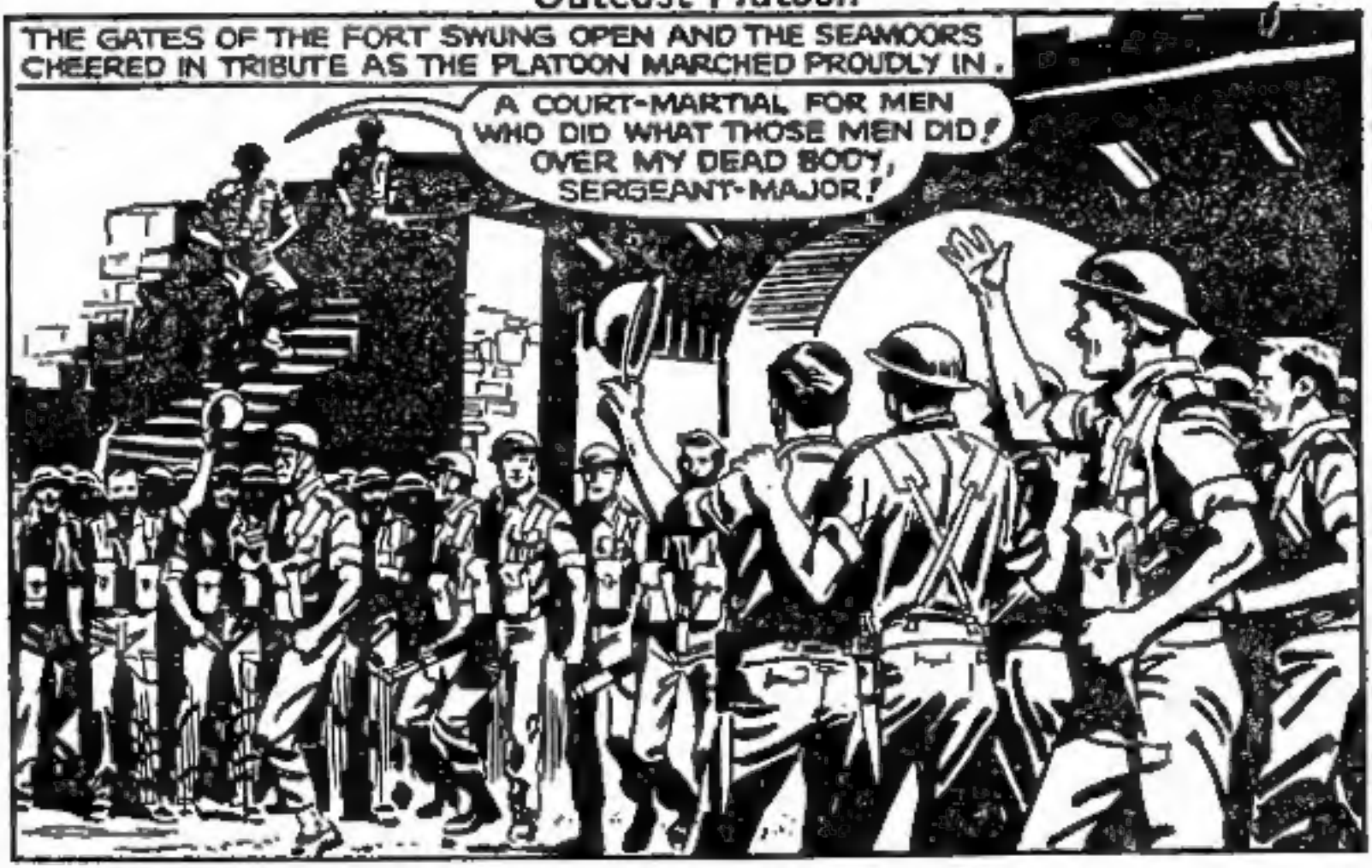
ONLY THE FRONT RANKS OF THE JAPS ESCAPED THAT DEVASTATING SERIES OF EXPLOSIONS.
GET BACK!
NO, THE FIELD IS IN FLAMES!

THEN BARKER AND HIS MEN ROSE LIKE AVENGING PHANTOMS FROM THEIR FOXHOLES.
CUT THEM DOWN, MEN!

THE SHOCKED JAPS FOUGHT LIKE CORNERED RATS.
KILL BEFORE WE, TOO, ARE KILLED!
AT LEAST OUR PRISONERS SHALL NOT ESCAPE!

IT WAS CAPTAIN MOGSON, THEN, WHO SAVED THE LIFE OF THE PLATOON'S OLD COMMANDER.
GOT HIM!

FROM THE FORT RAMPARTS, THE COLONEL STARED DOWN AT THE TRIUMPHANT OUTCAST PLATOON AND THE RESCUED BRITISH P.O.W.S.
THEY'VE DONE IT, BY GEORGE! THEY'VE SAVED THE FORT!
WHY THE HECK ARE THEY COURT-MARTIALLING MEN LIKE THOSE?


THE GATES OF THE FORT SWUNG OPEN AND THE SEAMOORS CHEERED IN TRIBUTE AS THE PLATOON MARCHED PROUDLY IN.
A COURT-MARTIAL FOR MEN WHO DID WHAT THOSE MEN DID! OVER MY DEAD BODY, SERGEANT-MAJOR!

WITH LIEUTENANT TRENT RESTORED TO HIS PLATOON AND ABLE TO GIVE HIS TESTIMONY, ALONG WITH COLONEL WELLS' ACCOUNT OF THE BATTLE FOR FORT ST. DAVID, THE ARMY AUTHORITIES MADE A QUICK DECISION.
THE COURT-MARTIAL CHARGE IS DROPPED AND THE N.C.O.s GET THEIR STRIPES BACK.
AND THE PLATOON IS ASKED TO FORM THE NUCLEUS OF A NEW SHOCK TROOP UNIT!

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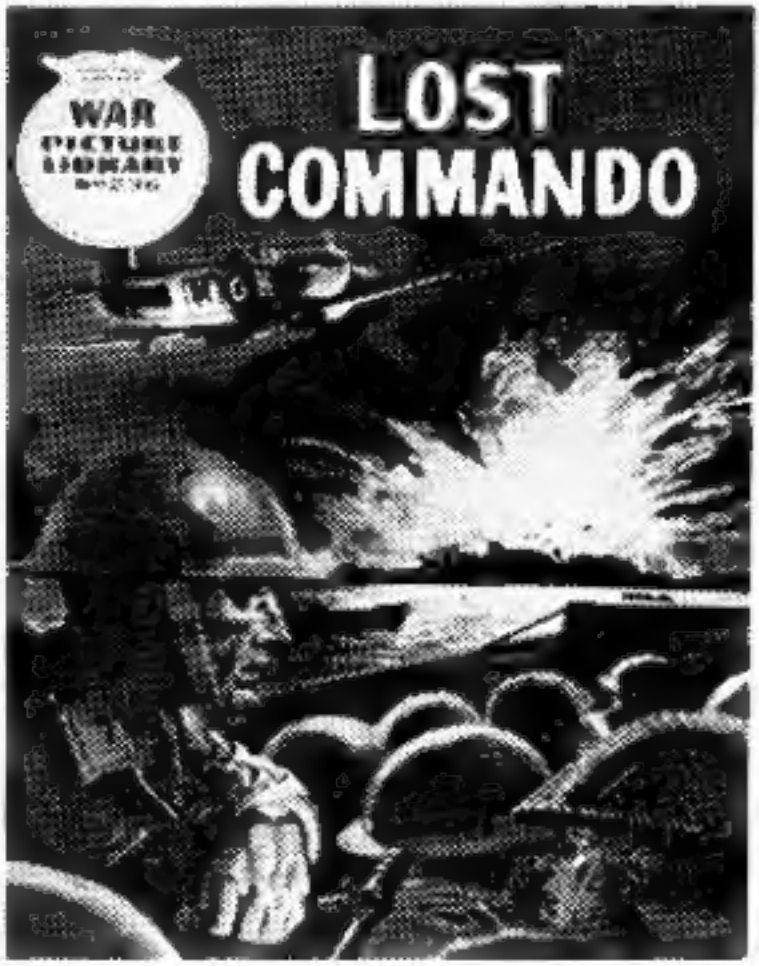

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